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ABSTRACT

Beginning with the contention that the principal is the pivotal person in bringing about school improvement, this paper reviews several of the trends discussed in John Naisbitt's "Megatrends" and assesses their significance for public education in general and for the role of the principal in particular. These trends include (1) the shift from an either/or society to one where multiple options are the rule; (2) the change from a centralized to a decentralized society; (3) the move from the family to the individual as the basic unit of society; (4) the trend from representative to participatory democracy; (5) the shift from short-term to long-term thinking; and (6) the change from a national to a global economy. A review of these trends is followed by a discussion of the current public concern over the quality of education and an evaluation of some of the more popular proposals for school improvement, including merit pay, teacher testing, differentiated staffing, and partnerships with business. In conclusion, five general suggestions for school improvement are offered: (1) tougher academic standards, (2) instruction geared to individual learning styles, (3) expanded counseling programs, (4) professionalization of teaching, and (5) responsibility training for students. (TE)

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EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

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by

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The princpalship is still the most exciting position in the school system. It is where the action is, literaly. It is a position from which so much can occur in school improvement. In 1974 I wrote an article entitled "The Principal: Still the Principal-Teacher." The evidence gleaned from recent studies of high school education gives me no reason to change the basic philosophy of this article. The principal is the pivotal person in making schools better.

The late Dr. J. Lloyd Trump started me in the principalship iin 1963. The following quote taken from a film made by the National Association of Secondary School Principals sounds much like the conclusions of many of the recent studies of the high school:

> School should be a challenging place, one that doesn't limit all learning to a place called a building or a classroom, that takes advantage of the learning opportunities in the community, at home, and from a variety of teachers, instead of limiting it to just one teacher at a given time.
>
> Each student is known and monitored by someone all the time, where they work harder than ever now because it's a challenging, interesting and really rewarding to them and rewarding to everyone in it.

What this quote does not say, but what Dr. Trump firmly believed was the importance of the principal in making these things happen in a school. To him, the principal, and only the principal, was the instructional leader of the school.

John Naisbitt in his book, Megatrends looks at several blockbuster trends which promise to have a decided impact on us individually and on public education. Several key trends are worth keeping in mind as we probe the function of the principal in the 1980's.

One such trend is the shift from an either or society to one where multiple options are the rule. Remember when life wasn't so complex when choices were much simpler than they are today.

EA 018 363

Think of the decisions our children must make and compare them with the decisions we had to make. With so many choices the implications for helping students with decision-making skills seems evident.

A second trend notes the change from a centralized to decentralized society. The central government is no longer the important force in public education. Education is truly becoming a function of the state, as defined in the Tenth Amendment, or a function of the local unit. As a result state and local politicians will become more important in public education. Educational leaders must learn how to work with politicians to influence and guide decisions.

Joel Garreau in The Nine Nations of North America postures the likenesses and differences of sections of the North American continent. He predicts the death of the big, industrial cities and the rise of the south, southwest, and west, sections with new names which include parts of Mexico, Canada, the Caribbean, and the United States.

A third important trend shows the move from the family to the individual as the basic unit. Twenty percent (20%) of our students reside in single-parent families and the trend is up. At my own school we found forty-two percent (42%) of our students came from single-parent families. In addition, note the growing number of latch-key children who come home to a vacant house where both parents work. This condition prompted Dr. Urie Brofenbrenner, Cornell University, to conclude that the peer group was becoming a more powerful education element in a child's education than the home or the school. It further notes that significant relationships with responsible adults are lacking. Children from single parent families are less likely to do well in school.

The shift from representative to participatory democracy can be seen in the "everyone wants to be included" phenomenon. All groups want direct involvement not just a proxy through an elected official. The new educational leader must be a facilitator. He or she must help teachers to identify problems and to solve them. This relationship requires more face-to-face contact. The effective principal should consider practicing what Tom Peters calls MBWA (Management By Wandering Around), a practice he found in most of the management practices of most of the successful corporations.

Additionally more people want a voice in what happens in their child's education. There will be more activism among parents in various forms.

The trend from short term to long term thinking requires an informed leadership with a vision of what can be. All strategic planning must begin with a vision, a broader view. Like the seagull in Bach's delightful Jonathan Livingston Seagull, we must

fly higher. Lee Iacocca's management system which he described in his autobiography bodes good advice for all us principals. Ask yourself One What are my objectives for the next ninety (90)days? Two What are my plans, my priorities, and my hopes? Three Where will the organization (school) be in five (5) years?

The change from a national economy to a global one will bring more direct comparisons of other educational systems with our own. It is no secret that the Japanese have wrested the watch industry from the Swiss, cameras from the Germans, shipbuilding from the British and automobiles from the United States. Looking at the Japanese system of education one is immediately struck by such statistics as a 240 day school year with mathematics and science required of all students each year; 93% graduation rate from high school; an average IQ of 111 with 35% scoring above 115; better school attendance; and a belief in the central importance of education. Compare these statistics with our inability to even get consensus on the importance of having students attend a full day of school each day. We rationalize everything from pep assemblies to visits to the orthodontist.

Leaving Naisbitt to focus on the conditions in education, the past ten (10) years have brought much public concern over the quality of education. There have been more than twenty-five (25) different national studies of the high school alone, not to mention the plethora of state-initiated studies. The clamor seems to call for tougher standards, a longer school year, better teachers and a longer school day.

Much of the motion for change began with the advent of minimum competency. The familiar scenario has narrowly defined basic skills becoming the focus of school curriculum reform and classroom instruction. Minimum standards caused us to pay attention to only certain educational outcomes at the expense of others. Morover, it began a trend which took the decision making authority away from the local unit. Forgetting the differences among the teaching force, we settled for the lowest common denominator.

If we had studied our history we would have learned that the British Reform Act of 1861 looks very much like the minimum competency reforms of the present era. Like us, the British found that the emphasis on minimum performance came at the expense of higher levels of thinking. The British disbanded the system after a decade.

When one examines the texts of many of the studies of high schools one emerges with a rather pessimistic view of the status of high school education. The best one can conclude is that we are mediocre. Note the following quotes from a variety of sources:

> On balance from mediocrity to excellence U.S. education is closer to mediocrity. (Goldberg, A Nation at Risk)
>
> The problems of schooling are of such crippling proportions that the entire public school system is near collapse. (Goodlad, A Place Called School)
>
> There is too much going on too fast in our schools to allow for much thinking. The structure of schools must be changed so that less content can be covered in greater depth. (Sizer, Horace's Compromise)
>
> The United States education system is promoting unilateral disarmament. We are raising the first generation in the nation's history that has received a poorer education than its parents. (Glenn Seaborg, Nobel Laureate)

Essentially, the studies recognize problems in the system and recommend anything from longer school years, to tougher standards, to more science and math, to a radical reorganization of the high school itself. Interestingly, each one acknowledges the importance of the principal.

The simplistic answer to improved instruction is the present move toward a system of merit pay. Merit pay plans call into question the familiar single-salary schedule with a kind of merit pay for all based on degrees earned and teaching experience and replaces it with a merit incentive for those teachers whose students demonstrate better results. The tougher question is how to do it fairly.

In Florida we have created a tempestuous situation by basing merit on the successful passing of a subject area test and the use of a common observation instrument. The results so far are not promising. One school district in Seiling, Oklahoma bases its merit pay solely on student outcomes. Using normal curve equivalent scores and criterion reference tests constructed by teachers, predictions are made, and if reached, result in cash bonuses to teachers. The Seiling program has been in place for several years. The superintendent says successfully in place.

An interesting offshoot of merit play is the idea of a merit school. Just like the Kansas City Royals shared equal pay offs for winning the world series, so the teachers, secretaries, cusotidians, etc. receive equal shares when the school meets approved academic targets.

Teacher unions, in addition to pushing to raise salaries

overall, generally favor a type of career ladder approach where teachers earn more by taking on additional responsibilities. This approach looks a lot like the old differentiated staffing model of a few years back.

Several reports call for the creative use of business people in areas of critical shortage. Others recommend incentive pay for areas where teachers are in short supply, especially math and science.

RX for Improving the High School

Whether or not there is a crisis in high school education may be debatable, but as the Chinese say, " a crisis can be an opportunity or a curse." Hans Selye reminds us that stress can be transformed from a negative to a positive force based on how the individual approaches the events. It is a matter of personal attitude and approach.

I personally feel that we have a tremendous opportunity to reshape the high school to the benefit of all concerned. The discrepancy model for change is based on the nation that people act when they perceive an intolerable gap between where they want to be and the status quo. The times were never more favorable for sound change and reasoned innovation. I offer five (5) suggestions.

(1) Tougher academic standards: Higher academic standards appear to be a trend in the right direction. State legislatures have enacted legislation which acknowledges a common core of content needed by all students. An increase in science and mathematics is based on the assumption that all citizens in a high tech society need a minimal technical education merely to function as intelligent citizens. If most of the population will change jobs several times in their lifetimes then continuing education is going to be a way of life. Life long learners seem better equipped when they emerge from a common curriculum than if they are the products of too much diversity and curriculum choice. The high school in recent years has been characterized by a proliferation of elective subjects. The result of this condition is that there are no clear values as to what academic programs are essential for all youth. Yet, the findings of the effective schools research indicate that most student rise to the level of expectations which we hold for them.

(2) Instruction Geared to Individual Student Learning Styles: Tougher standards to no guarantee higher student achievement. They only "set the bar higher." The real challenge comes in coaching students to jump higher. Bloom's work in mastery learning demonstrates that all students, or at least 90 percent of the students can master common objectives if we vary

the approach for individual students. One promising direction is the work currently underway in student learning styles. These learning styles can be diagnosed to assist with prescribing more effective methods of instruction. In essence, we can hold outcomes standard and vary the ways in which students get there. The research in learning styles shows that when we diagnose and prescribe according to learning students three outcomes are achieved, (a) higher student achievement, (b) improved student attitudes, and (c) fewer discipline problems.

(3) Expanded Advisement Programs: Counselors cannot know students as individuals when they confront 300 to 400 students and must spend most of their time on those who need special attention. All school based professionals should serve as advisors to students on a regular basis. The close relationship of a caring, responsible adult and an individual student can help identify the student's uniqueness as a learner.

The idea of teachers serving as advisors is not new. In fact, it was part of the NASSP Model Schools Project in the early 1970's. When I attended high school in 1948 I had a teacher advisor. He had no easy assignment, getting to know 38 students as individuals wthout the adequate time arrangement to do so. I do recall; however, that he found time to visit my home and, I presume, the homes of the other 37. The point isn't that advisement is an impossible task only that we recognized its importance 40 years ago. The advisement program was implemented much better in many of the model schools of the 70's. At Wilde Lake, for example, where I was principal we guaranteed eight(8) individual conferences per year for each student.

The advisor is the adult in the school who knows the student best. He or she knows about the student's previous learning history and current learning style and uses that information in developing an educational plan for each advisee. Preently, Florida has 39 high schools implementing a teacher advisor program where the focus is on the individual student to help him/her to achieve academically, be a better decision maker and be more informed about graduation requirements, test scores and other educational matters of importance. Over 43,000 students were involved in the program the first year.

(4) Professionalization of Teaching: If we administrators are going to expect teachers to accept more responsibility then we must find ways to allow them to do so. Physicians are capable of carrying bed pans, but they don't. They use their time for more productive activities; so be it with teachers. Teachers need time to advise individual students, time to plan for instruction, time to converse with colleagues. time to engage students in subject matter. One incentive to a person considering teaching as a profession is money. A second incentive is having the time to do a quality job. Teachers cannot do it when they teach five (5) hours per day, 130-150 students plus monitor the halls, cafeteria and buses and chaperone after school activities. Yet, this is what we

typically expect.

One solution to this situation is the implementation of a differential staffing model where each teacher has access to the services of a clerical assistant, where the direct supervision of some instructional activities is conducted by aides with less than a baccalaureate degree and where general student supervision is accomplished by other adults. School-based management is a way to give some administrators more voice in running the enterprise. Differential staffing of this type can emerge from this kind of local control.

Another useful incentive is paying teachers to participate in meaningful staff development activities designed to improve their instructional skills. Some school districts are paying teachers an hourly rate for time devoted to staff development beyond the regular school day. Wny not? Industry does it with success.

(5) Responsibility Training: A natural accompaniment of a new approach to school organization is holding students accountable for correcting irresponsible behavior, behavior which is considered outside the limits of reasonable school rules. Typically, our discipline programs rely on traditional forms of control which involve various forms of punishment. The difficulty with punishment is that it only tells students to stop what they are doing. It doesn't teach then a better way to act.

New personalized learning techniques will go a long way in reducing discipline problems; however, they will not eliminate them. When they do arise they should be handled in a tough, authoritarian way which treats students with respect but requires them to own the irresponsible behavior and to change it. Helping students to be responsible seems clearly a direction appropriate to today's society.

Summary

The two characteristics of a good school are productivity and satisfaction for all people who live and work in the institution. Examine your present school setting to see how you are doing. Look at some vital signs: attendance, failure rate, drop outs, honor/achievements. If you are doing well in all the areas share your approach with others. If not, make a plan to do better.

The principal is the key to an excellent school. The effective principal models good teaching, practices MBWA, plans with vision, involves teachers in decision making, monitors school progress and keeps the goals of the school relevant and in focus.

Remember ideals are not givens they are conditions to be achieved. Whatever direction you choose to take, and we all

make choices, do it well. The Greeks have a word for it. Arete means the best. It means being the best possible you of all the possibilities that you are able to become.

The times are changing more quickly and more profoundly for comfort. Going with the flow of that change makes sense in adjusting schools for what is and what can be. Either we act to bring about change or someone will do it for us. We are already seeing this happen. I, for one, have faith in the judgment of educators. Let us seize the moment and begin to bring ouir schools in line with important changes in our society. The times were never more efficacious.